

Minutes

**Rail Advisory Board Meeting
Forum Room
Science Museum of Virginia
2500 W. Broad Street
Richmond VA
November 9, 2006**

Members present:

Sharon Bulova, Chairman
Dwight Farmer

Trenton Crewe
Wiley Mitchell, Jr.

Richard L. Beadles
Peter J. Shutz

Member absent:

Bruno Maestri

Jack Quinn

The meeting was called to order at 10:12 AM by Ms. Sharon Bulova, Chairman.

Adoption of Meeting Agenda

A motion to accept the agenda of the November 9, 2006 meeting was made by Peter Shutz and seconded by Wiley Mitchell. Richard Beadles moved for an amendment to the agenda to include a discussion of the I-95 Corridor, emphasizing that this should be given top priority. Wiley Mitchell felt it was imperative to discuss a recommendation to the General Assembly that the 30% matching funds required for project funding are inadequate for public projects. He also felt that discussion should center around proposed recommendations to the 2007 General Assembly in regards to the Board's ability to meet identified needs of the public component. Sharon Bulova recommended that the subjects be tabled until the Legislative Section of the meeting. This was found favorable and the amended agenda including the I-95 Corridor was unanimously approved.

Adoption of Minutes

A motion to accept the minutes of the September 14, 2006 meeting was made by Mr. Beadles and seconded by Wiley Mitchell. A correction to Page 4 Paragraph 4 of the minutes was noted by Wiley Mitchell. This was so noted by the Board and the minutes were unanimously approved.

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Ms. Bulova noted the absence of Bruno Maestri from today's meeting. She also announced that Mr. Hunter Watson, liaison to the Commonwealth Transportation Board, will no longer be serving with the Rail Advisory Board. Ms. Bulova praised his services. In his place will be Mr. James Keen. Ms. Bulova stated that he was not able to attend today's meeting and is soon to be sworn in and will hopefully be present at the January meeting of the Board.

Public Comments

There were no public comments received by e-mail.

Nancy Finch and Lois Walker of Virginians for High Speed, signed up for public comment prior to the meeting.

Nancy Finch introduced into the minutes a letter from Thomas G. Tingle, AIA, and Immediate Past President for Virginians for High Speed Rail. In this letter Mr. Tingle stated there is an overall rail crisis in Virginia. To emphasize this point, Mr. Tingle cited the recent consideration by Amtrak to significantly reduce rail service prior to the Jamestown 2007 celebration. This reduction was deferred for the time being due to the combined efforts of "passenger rail advocates, the DRPT, Rep. Jo Ann Davis of the 1st District and others." Mr. Tingle went on to state that while other states are expanding rail service, Virginia is in a struggle to maintain the status quo. With this in mind, he closed with asking that the Board consider a new course in the operation of the Rail Enhancement Fund that would steer monies towards passenger service. He also indicated a desire to attend the next Board meeting to discuss passenger rail improvements.

Lois Walker of Virginians for High Speed Rail commented on the potential loss of Amtrak service to Richmond's Main Street Station. She stated that Main Street Station could be a viable economic tool for the region. Ms. Walker urged that the General Assembly be given input from the Rail Advisory Board on this matter. Ms. Bulova asked that the issue be addressed in the Legislative Section of the Agenda. Mr. Beadles commented that he had both comments and suggestions regarding this issue.

Amtrak Presentation

Thomas Schmidt, Assistant Vice President of Transportation for Amtrak, gave an informational overview of on-time performance along with suggestions for performance enhancement in the Commonwealth.

Amtrak services fall into four categories. These are:

1. Corridor Service which includes Newport News/Richmond to Boston

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2. Short Haul Service, which includes The Palmetto and The Carolinian with no sleeper cars, and minimum food service
3. Long Haul Service, i.e. The Silver Service and The Auto Train, which provide sleeper service and full dining service
4. Commuter Service (VRE)

He also informed the Board and contingents that Amtrak owns and operates NO facilities in Virginia except for the stations. The host railroads include CSXT, Norfolk Southern and Buckingham Branch RR (on the former CSXT line).

The presentation went on to compare On Time Performance (OTP) between the various categories. Out of 46 states surveyed, Virginia was ranked in the top third in performance. Mr. Schmidt went on to cite some hindrances to OTP. These include:

- Track capacity which includes consideration of freight train interference, causing delays to both commuter and passenger trains
- Infrastructure which includes slow orders by dispatchers, equipment failure, repairs or breakdown
- Passenger issues such as physically challenged passengers, passengers who become ill while on board, and passenger/luggage disembarkation
- Other challenges to OTP would include inclement weather, accidents, issues of security, and third party issues

Mr. Schmidt concluded by saying that focus is needed on the RF&P Corridor with emphasis on train volume and delay experience. He stated that with a coordinated effort various interests can be accommodated including, intercity passengers, commuters, freight OTP and reliability and a host of railroad issues. Mr. Schmidt made a pledge to do so in conjunction with the Board.

When questioned by Mr. Beadles as to how many dollars are now available for infrastructural improvement, Mr. Schmidt responded that there are now \$4 million in the Host Railroad Investment Fund. Mr. Schmidt continued to state that movement is underway to increase the fund. At the present time, no efforts have been made to match these funds.

The real challenge at present is OTP, Mr. Schmidt stated. Trains are 35-40 minutes late. Multiple issues contribute to this problem. Lots of work must be undertaken in all Corridors. Any train 11 or more minutes late is considered a failure in regards to OTP. Mr. Schmidt then stated that this performance is still far superior to the airline industry.

Mr. Mitchell asked for further explanation as to the number of causes hindering OTP. Mr. Schmidt began by stating there are capacity issues wherein there are more trains than track. There are also delays with food and supplies being taken on the train and luggage being taken off. Dispatching orders may result in trains waiting on trains at various junctions, and equipment failure is an ongoing problem.

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When asked by Mr. Mitchell if a distinction is made between various areas in regards to track capacity, Mr. Schmidt replied that most delays are in the I-95 Corridor. This includes Richmond, Quantico and the Washington Metro Area. Mr. Schmidt also cited defective equipment, total breakdowns in equipment, engine trouble, passenger misinformation and accidents that include striking trespassers, which can bring hours long delays or the complete termination of a train's run.

When asked by Mr. Shudtz if he felt that railroad enhancements were a viable idea for the I-95 Corridor, Mr. Schmidt replied in the affirmative and felt that the market stands to grow.

Mr. Farmer asked if delays are so frequent that they can be built into the schedules. Mr. Schmidt replied that lengthening the schedule does not appeal to riders. The problem is still being addressed. Mr. Farmer further stated that passengers ought not to have the expectation of being on time 80% of the time. He further stated that these redundancies should be addressed. Mr. Schmidt said that changes are being made. Ms. Bulova then stated that John Gibson of CSX had suggested at the last meeting that time that delays should be built into the schedule. Mr. Schmidt said that he was in agreement as to the suggestion being realistic. Transit time is important, and this is an ongoing issue being addressed.

Mr. Mitchell then asked which issue did Mr. Schmidt feel was more of a priority; Infrastructure or Track Capacity. Mr. Schmidt then answered that realistically he felt that it was more an issue of capacity than infrastructure. Mr. Mitchell stated that up until now, no proposal has been received from Amtrak. Mr. Mitchell felt that the Board would like to know which is critical to Amtrak. Mr. Schmidt stated that was why he was present, in response to comments that Amtrak had not been participating. In the future, he plans to provide more insight into Amtrak's perspective on the situation. He wishes to have more participation in these discussions and again pledged his support.

Virginia Railway Express Presentation

This presentation, given by Dale Zehner, Chief Executive Office of VRE, included information regarding VRE OTP and included suggestions to achieve results and meet expectations in the Commonwealth.

Mr. Zehner opened by saying that VRE has experienced double digit growth annually for over five years. Parking lots were over 100% full with a growing ridership. Ridership is down today due to:

- Low OTP
- Rising Fares
- Cutbacks in service

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Also challenges to OTP through the January-October 2006 period included intense heat, along with equipment failures generated by said heat and loss of passengers. It is more important for passengers to get to work in the mornings therefore they are even more unwilling to suffer delays. VRE has even begun a policy wherein a passenger is entitled to a free ride if a delay of 30 minutes or more is encountered.

If one train is late leaving, the one behind will also be late. The problem is getting out on time at the outset. Ten or fifteen minutes cannot be made up. Passenger offload time must also be addressed. For instance if an 8 car train pulls into a 6 car station, passengers are forced to walk through the train to cars which are accommodated by the station, thereby increasing delay time. Other reasons for delay may include:

- Rain: this past June was the wettest on record and cancelled one day of service. There were flood restrictions, washouts and fallen trees. 66% of trains were delayed due to 4 days of flood restrictions.
- Heat: CSX heat restriction threshold changed from 90-95 degrees during July. 61% of Fredericksburg trains were delayed due to heat restrictions between June 15 and July 31, 2006
- Dispatching: Heavy turnover in Jacksonville Fla. There was a loss of experienced dispatchers due to retirement. The railroad hopes to draft them in capacity of trainers to younger employees in future.
- Signal/Switches: Degradation due to disruption to tie replacement program. This was coupled with maintenance problems.
- Congestion: Work on the railroad caused delays for two summers due to tie replacement projects. Because of recurring heat restrictions similar delays will be encountered in the future. In addition, a third track is needed on the Fredericksburg line.

Steps have been implemented to confront these problems. Meetings have been held with executives of CSX and NS who have committed to improving VRE operations. Changes are underway for dispatching. One change being considered is the moving of all dispatching to Baltimore. By receiving written reports or phone calls on all major outages, passengers can be notified of delays in advance by e-mail. Also, scheduled changes went into effect October 30th of this year along with updated timetables.

Other projects underway include completion of the tie program on CSX; completion of the Quantico Bridge and a third track and storage track at L'Enfant. Because of the aforementioned, OTP for October 2006 was increased in the Fredericksburg and Manassas Regions with an overall improvement in the System of 89.3% in October as opposed to 53.5% in July. Only ten out of sixty-five delays were over 30 minutes. The number of delays was down from 287 in July to 65 in October. With this in mind, OTP will continue to improve. Our railroads have made a commitment. A VRE Ad campaign was launched on October 9th. A Public Forum was held on October 19th.

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Mr. Mitchell asked regarding extended services to Haymarket. Mr. Zehner replied that the grant had been approved. The contract has been signed and everything is on track.

Mr. Beadles asked if service had been extended as far as Spotsylvania. Mr. Zehner responded that there were enough votes to carry this motion. The Spotsylvania County Board was not in favor.

Ms. Bulova remarked that it was encouraging to have a presentation focusing on what things are going wrong and pinpointing what improvements have been made. The Board was left with a favorable opinion.

Rail Enhancement Fund Current Status and Way Forward

This presentation was given by Matt Tucker, Executive Director, DRPT and included information about the current status of the REF Agreements, the proposed update of the Application Procedures and the Stakeholder survey results information.

Mr. Tucker opened with statements showing that out of 13 projects approved by RAB/CTB, 12 are managed by DRPT, the Median Rail Project has been turned over to Virginia Port Authority. Of these 1 agreement has been signed, 8 are in negotiations with grantee, 2 are in final internal review and 2 will not move forward.

These latter two are the Charlottesville Connecting Track Upgrade Study and the Richmond Port Passenger/Freight Improvements Study. All other projects have Projected Completion Dates from Summer of 2007 through Summer of 2008.

Next discussed were the new REF Application Procedures. Timeline for implementation is as follows:

- November: the first draft presented at the meeting today along with public comments received on the current document
- Nov-Dec: 30 day public comment period.
- January: Final draft approval at January RAB meeting
- March: CTB to approve final application procedures at their March action meeting
- April: Open application process to begin.

The key changes to the open application period are projects are allowed to be considered and advanced more frequently than at one time per year. Funding is made available more frequently. A more detailed review process and public benefit analysis becomes available. DRPT is allowed to negotiate the best possible contract for each project. Applications are to be submitted as early as April, 2007 following CTB adoption of the final document at its March meeting.

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The next part of the presentation dealt with the DRPT's Strategic Rail Investment Plan. The goals listed for the plan included:

- Set priorities for state investments in rail which will include identifying priority rail corridors and choke points for investment
- Establishing a reference to help guide REF and other DRPT rail fund investments
- Focusing on completing high impact improvements first to make the most of limited funding.

Key elements which will bring about the realization of these goals include:

- Updating and expansion upon the Virginia State Rail Plan of 2004
- The inclusion of data from other rail initiatives; these being the Statewide Multimodal Freight Study and the passenger Rail Studies
- The enhancement of public benefit analysis through the weighing of projects based on a point system and the incorporation of policy goal requirements of the REF
- The incorporation of the best practices established by VA transportation programs such as Transportation Enhancement

Priorities to be set for the Strategic Rail Investment Plan are:

- Initiate development in Fall 2006
- Review of draft document in Summer 2007
- Implementation in Fall 2007

In summary Mr. Tucker stated that DRPT needs a thorough self-assessment along with contemplation of our future moves as they benefit the public component.

Questions were then turned over to Mr. Kevin B. Page. Mr. Beadles wanted to know what was the timetable for input on this study from the Board? Mr. Beadles was informed that now was the time for all input. A thirty day process is in place. Attention was brought to Page 5 of the presentation for further clarification. At the January meeting, the Board will see the final draft of the proposal. There was further discussion of the process. It was noted by Mr. Page that final changes to the application procedures will be approved by the CTB in March. Mr. Beadles stated that he would rather talk to someone in authority with someone at DRPT and submit further suggestions and comments in person which was agreed upon.

The presentation was praised by Ms. Bulova as it does bring into play the proactive approach which had previously been favorably discussed by members of the Board.

At this point, Mr. Mitchell inquired into the feasibility of acquiring a private railroad car as member of the Board or with the Board as full entity. It was clarified that there

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seemed to be no provisions in the law through which the Board's authority could be loaned to such an undertaking.

Some discussion ensued as to the full authority of the Board under the Code of Virginia. Mr. Beadles then noted that the Board is in the position to react to suggested projects but not to solicit them.

Mr. Tucker stated that his goal is indeed to solicit goals from the public and state entities. At this point, DRPT and the Board are identifying high profile projects.

Mr. Beadles interjected that under the Code of Virginia that DRPT is charged with preserving, protecting planning and developing the present transportation units throughout the state. He went on to say that perhaps DRPT has more funding and staffing to fulfill this mandate than it is currently utilizing.

The meeting adjourned for lunch at 12:00 PM

The meeting was reconvened at 12:45 PM by Ms. Sharon Bulova, Chairman.

With permission from the chairman, Mr. Kevin Page honored Mr. Ranjeet Rathore, on his upcoming retirement from the Virginia Department of Rail & Public Transportation. Mr. Page gave a brief personal and work history of Mr. Rathore with emphasis on his 34 years of loyal service to the Commonwealth. Mr. Rathore was wished well by the entire Board.

Update on Roanoke Region Intermodal Facility Site Search

This was an update by Mr. Page, Director of Rail Transportation, to the Board on DRPT's efforts to identify and evaluate the most suited site for investment of public funds.

The REF Project Site Evaluation and Selection Plan was reviewed. This included:

- DRPT's notification of Norfolk Southern (NS) of the general parameters expected of a qualified site.
- The pursuance of proposals from NS and affected localities in the geographic area. There was a two week offering period from the date of the letter of notification.
- Site evaluation process to be put into place after receipt of all proposals

The site evaluation process will require a 45 day review period. This will involve working with NS, The Virginia Department of Transportation and the Virginia Port Authority. Public comment is also to be taken into consideration during this period. Responses to public comment will be issued upon completion of the review process.

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Upon completion of the above, DRPT and NS will seek to agree on the proposed site. The announcement of the approval of the site would be given by DRPT. At this point, DRPT would work with NS on plans to proceed with final design and construction. If no agreement can be reached between these entities, Rail Enhancement funding will not be applied to the site by DRPT.

At this point Mr. Beadles asked if impossible criteria were being imposed. Mr. Tucker indicated that progress cannot be obtained without pain.

Further discussion about whether or not matching funds can be provided for different projects/corridors. Mr. Page reiterated that this would indeed involve further investigation.

Proposed Schedule of Meetings for 2007

The proposed schedule of meetings for 2007 was approved after the decision to hold the January meeting on January 11, 2007. It was noted by Ms. Bulova that the meetings are now going to be held on a quarterly rather than bi-monthly basis. She commented that this would ensure meatier discussions for one day. Also it was noted that some members travel great distances to attend these meetings and this would add to their convenience.

Informational Items for the Board

Mr. Page briefed the Board Members regarding informational items at the back of their packets. After an investigation of these, Mr. Page asked Dr. Mary Lynn Tischer, Virginia Representative of the I-95 Corridors Coalition to come and forward to speak. Dr. Tischer explained that the Corridors of the Future Program is made up of representatives of the states from Florida to Maine with an inclusion of two associates in Canada. The Corridor Coalition has at this time identified two major projects. They are:

- Attention to bottlenecks and the attempt to develop improvements to the situation and;
- Enhancing communication along the entire Corridor

Responses included reinvestigating survey identifying Corridors in Virginia that needed funding. Discussion ensued as to the need of informing the Federal Department of Transportation of the Board's belief in the importance of investment in the I-95 Corridor.

Mr. Beadles indicated that it was important that problems along the Corridor be identified by Virginia as they had been by Maryland and North Carolina. Mr. Mitchell said that a lack of identification indicated that Virginia did not take this as seriously as Maryland or North Carolina who had included the Corridor in their studies.

With this in mind, Ms. Bulova suggested that a follow-up letter/application be submitted with an emphasis on the Board's belief that the challenges facing the I-95 Corridor are

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indeed of the highest priority. She was assured by Dr. Tischer that this was feasible. This is a two phase study. Mr. Shudtz heartily agreed with the idea, citing the need to clarify the Board's emphasis on support for I-95 improvement. Also discussed was a need for further investigation into authority of Board as to indicating rail areas with funding needs.

Mr. Farmer then commented that while the Port of Virginia is growing with recent increases in funding and building already begun on different projects, I-64 has no projected funding sources for the next 20 years. Along with this, CSX and NS lines are still struggling for rail improvements. These two Corridors are the main connections to the second largest Port on the East Coast. Surely these Corridors and their problems must be addressed.

A discussion of service at the Main Street Station ensued. While service has not been discontinued, there seems to be fears that there may be. The Board is aware of the Amtrak Strategic Plan and will do its best to keep open the lines of communication regarding this subject.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:47 PM.